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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PRAGUE 001074

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/05/2015

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MARR](#) [EZ](#)

SUBJECT: CZECH EX-PRIME MINISTER PUTS U.S. AND MISSILE  
DEFENSE AT CENTER OF WAR OF WORDS WITH NEW GOVERNMENT

REF: STATE 145264

Classified By: Ambassador William Cabaniss for reasons 1.4 b+d

11. (C) Summary: Former Czech PM Jiri Paroubek took advantage of a farewell call by Ambassador to punctuate his political battle with the new government, and specifically with new Foreign Minister Vondra with whom Paroubek has had difficult relations. Ambassador used the farewell call to sound out Paroubek on his party's views towards a possible missile defense facility in the Czech Republic. Paroubek loudly later proclaimed to the press that there is no support for basing of missile interceptors among his party, and therefore he will not support it. However, as he did not mention to the press, Paroubek told the Ambassador that he believes a radar facility to be a different story. We expect that, unfortunately, the missile defense question will continue to be a leading topic in the public sparring between Paroubek and the Topolane government. However, we expect both sides will continue to chose their words carefully to leave room open for a radar facility, if that is offered. End summary.

12. (C) Ambassador Cabaniss met outgoing Prime Minister Jiri Paroubek on the morning of September 4, just hours before President Klaus appointed a new government and Paroubek's cabinet formally left office (septel). The meeting had been requested to discuss Paroubek's views -- and the position of his party, the Social Democrats (CSSD) -- on missile defense. Given the timing, the Ambassador used the meeting to deliver the farewell message from President Bush (reftel) and offer his own thanks for Czech support for U.S. priorities. The meeting was very cordial. Paroubek noted that support for strong transatlantic ties had been a priority for his government's foreign policy, and assured the Ambassador that in opposition he would continue to support U.S.-Czech ties.

13. (C) Ambassador asked Paroubek for his views on the missile defense debate. Paroubek said he would reply solely in his capacity as CSSD Chairman. He cited the (disputed) figure of 80% of Czechs being opposed to missile defense to explain that there was no support within CSSD for a missile defense base; with less than two months to go before Senate and municipal elections, Paroubek said that it would be impossible to change the party's position on this. However, Paroubek made clear that this position refers to a base housing interceptors. A radar facility is "a different story." Being careful not to box himself in, Paroubek said that "CSSD can talk about radar." He also said he prefers to frame the discussion in terms of a radar facility, rather than a radar "base." More specifically, Paroubek said that if/if the USG were to propose that the Czech Republic host a MD-related radar facility, he would need to of course study the proposal carefully and assess "the obligations and what the facility would mean for the Czechs." Absent this detail he could not make any promises on how his party would respond to a USG offer. But he repeated that, from the CSSD

perspective, an offer of a radar-only facility could have a positive outcome, while a base including interceptors would not.

¶4. (C) Paroubek went on to explain that the CSSD Central Committee would meet on Saturday (9/9/06). While the focus would be largely on domestic issues, he fully expects that someone in the party will put on the table a proposal that CSSD take a formal stand against missile defense. Paroubek said that in this situation he is prepared to find language that would exclude radars from the resolution. But he cautioned that there is no guarantee of success.

¶5. (U) Paroubek subsequently released the text of the President's letter to the press. He also issued a public statement saying that he had told the Ambassador that CSSD is opposed to missile defense (however he made no mention of radar).

¶6. (C) Concurrently, several members of new PM Topolaneck's cabinet made supportive statements on missile defense. Topolaneck reiterated his earlier statements that missile defense has his full support; new Defense Minister Sedivy echoed these sentiments. But the loudest statements came from new Foreign Minister Sasha Vondra. Continuing a long-running personal battle with Paroubek, Vondra blasted the CSSD position as harmful to Czech interests. Paroubek responded with a stinging criticism of Vondra, including Vondra's support for the war with Iraq. Vondra, who is running for the Senate on the ODS ticket, accused Paroubek of turning missile defense into an election issue, and promised that as foreign minister he would ensure that Czech foreign policy remained "balanced" and supported both Czech interests and "commitments to its allies."

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¶7. (C) Comment: Now that he is in opposition, and given that he hopes to be asked to form a government if Topolaneck loses his vote of confidence, we fully expect Paroubek to miss no opportunity to bash ODS. Since the new government is firmly in favor of missile defense, we can expect that Paroubek's public comments on MD will all be negative -- particularly since he and Vondra appear determined to air their personal differences in public. However, Paroubek has so far chosen his words carefully. He has stopped talking about a referendum, which he knows is an issue of concern to the USG.

He is avoiding any mention of radars, and accepting the prevailing public convention that "missile defense" equals interceptors. The fact that Paroubek hopes to be prime minister again in the near future means that his rhetoric -- as inflammatory as it comes off -- will actually be somewhat more nuanced than we might expect from him if he were solely an opposition leader.

CABANISS